

February 6 2001

Mr. John L. Margowski, Director
Waukesha County Veterans' Services

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VA LINKS AGENT ORANGE AND DIABETES

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Vietnam veterans with Type 11 diabetes will now be eligible for disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) based on their resumed exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides. Acting Secretary Hershel W. Gober announced today his decision to add diabetes to the list of presumptive diseases associated with herbicide exposure.

Gober's decision follows the latest in a series of reports by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) examining the impact of herbicide exposure on veterans' health. The most recent IOM report, released last month, included a review of research efforts by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the U.S. Air Force. Based on this new information, IOM researchers found "limited / suggestive" evidence of an association between the chemicals used in herbicides during the Vietnam War and adult-onset (Type-11) diabetes.

"This is a significant milestone in our ongoing effort to keep America's promise to her veterans,. especially those who suffer from this debilitating and life-altering disease," said Gober. "It also validates the process we've established to ensure decisions of this magnitude are based on the medical and scientific standards required by the law."

VA officials cautioned it will take several months to write the rules before Vietnam veterans with diabetes can begin applying for disability compensation. They can, however, enroll in VA's health care system immediately and begin receiving the care they need.

Diabetes mellitus is characterized by high blood sugar levels resulting from the body's inability to process the hormone insulin. More than 90 percent of the 16 million diabetics in the United States are categorized at Type-11, which occurs primarily in adults.

Approximately 16 percent of veterans receiving care in VA medical facilities have been diagnosed with diabetes.

Diabetes is the sixth leading cause of death and the leading cause of blindness in the United States.

The number of diseases VA has recognized as being associated with Agent Orange exposure expanded considerably during the 1990s. The following conditions are now considered service- connected for Vietnam veterans: chloracne (a skin disorder), porphyria cutanea tarda, acute or subacute peripheral neuropathy (a nerve disorder), non- Hodgkin's lymphoma, soft tissue sarcoma, Hodgkin's disease, multiple myeloma, prostate cancer and respiratory cancers (including cancers of the lung, larynx, trachea and bronchus). In addition, Vietnam veterans' children with the birth defect spina bifida are eligible for certain benefits and services.

VA already grants service-connection for diabetes when the diabetes developed during "or was otherwise related to" military service. "Service-connection" is necessary to receive VA disability compensation and may place the veteran in a higher priority classification for VA health care. Gober's decision paves the way for that designation to be applied to any veteran who served in-theater during the Vietnam War and subsequently develops diabetes, without the diabetic veteran having to prove that Agent Orange caused the disease

Today's announcement begins a 60-day period for VA to publish proposed rules for implementing this change in benefits. After the rules are published, a 90-day period begins during which VA will seek input

to the proposal, including a public comment period. When this process is complete, VA will publish final rules for implementing the change.

Additional information regarding medical care and compensation for veterans is available at VA regional offices or medical centers. The telephone numbers can be found in local directories under the "U.S. Government" listing. In most areas, for information about disability compensation and VA pensions, callers can use the following toll-free number: 1-800-827-1 000. For health care and co-payment information, call 1 - 877- 222-8387. Information is also available on VA's Webpage, www.va.gov. Waukesha County Veterans should contact: the Waukesha County Veterans' Service Office, located in the Human Service Center, 500 Riverview Avenue, RoomGI38,Waukesha,WI53188-3680,or call 262-548-7732.

Previous